

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

1. (Currently amended) A method for creating customized disk images for loading software onto a computer, the method comprising the steps:

receiving software requirements for a given system from each of a plurality of users;

determining (a) a plurality of software components that will fulfill the software requirements while addressing constraints and affinities between said plurality of software components and (b) a respective plurality of configuration options that reflect current best practices with regard to said plurality of software components; and

generating a disk image containing at least one item said plurality of software components configured according to said respective plurality of configuration options.  
~~wherein the at least one item of software complies with at least a subset of the software requirements.~~

2. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, ~~further comprising applying~~  
wherein said determining step applies rules to the software requirements to identify software [[items]] components that comply with the software requirements.

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Currently amended) The method of ~~claim 3,~~ claim 2, wherein the rules include rules mapping a software requirement into a corresponding ~~software item~~ software component.

5. (Currently amended) The method of ~~claim 3,~~ claim 2, wherein the rules include rules specifying when particular versions of a particular ~~software item~~ software component are to be utilized.

6. (Currently amended) The method of ~~claim 3,~~ claim 2, wherein the rules include rules specifying installation options regarding a particular ~~software item~~ software component.

7. (Currently amended) The method of ~~claim 3~~, claim 2, wherein the rules include rules specifying how to test a particular ~~software item~~ software component.
8. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
testing the disk image.
9. (Currently amended) The method of claim 8, wherein testing the disk image includes verifying that ~~the at least one item~~ said plurality of software components complies with the software requirements.
10. (Currently amended) The method of claim 8, wherein testing the disk image includes verifying that ~~the at least one item~~ said plurality of software components complies with at least one rule.
11. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
generating a difference image that represents differences between the disk image and another existing disk image, whereby the another existing disk image may be updated to match the disk image by applying the difference image to the another existing disk image.
12. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the software requirements are received through a network that includes the Internet.
13. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the software requirements can be received in terms of customer needs rather than specific software components.  
~~the network includes the Internet.~~
14. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the requirements are represented in a structured format.
15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the structured format is Extensible Markup Language (XML).
16. (Currently amended) A method for creating a customized disk image for loading software onto a computer, the method comprising the computer-implemented steps:

parsing a plurality of inputs regarding a desired system to extract specifications regarding software;

evaluating a plurality of rules with respect to the plurality of inputs to derive a set of software ~~items~~ components conforming to ~~at least~~ the specifications;

evaluating a second plurality of rules with respect to the plurality of inputs to derive a set of configuration options conforming to at least the specifications;

storing each software ~~item~~ component from the set of software ~~items~~ components on a storage device;

configuring each software ~~item~~ component stored on the storage device in accordance to the set of configuration options; and

generating a disk image from contents of the storage device.

17. (Original) The method of claim 16, wherein the plurality of inputs are requests from hypertext browsers.

18. (Original) The method of claim 16, wherein the plurality of inputs are XML documents.

19. (Currently amended) A computer program product stored in a computer-readable medium and comprising functional descriptive data that, when executed by a computer, enables the computer to ~~perform acts including~~ create customized disk images for loading software onto a computer, including the steps:

receiving software requirements for a given system from each of a plurality of users;

determining (a) a plurality of software components that will fulfill the software requirements while addressing constraints and affinities between said plurality of software components and (b) a respective plurality of configuration options that reflect current best practices with regard to said plurality of software components; and

generating a disk image containing at least one item said plurality of software components configured according to said respective plurality of configuration options.  
~~, wherein the at least one item of software complies with at least a subset of the software requirements.~~

20. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 19, ~~comprising additional functional descriptive data that, when executed by the computer, enables the computer to perform additional acts including: applying wherein said determining step~~ applies rules to the software requirements to identify ~~software item~~ software component that comply with the software requirements.
21. (Original) The computer program product of claim 20, wherein the rules are stored in a database.
22. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 21, wherein the rules include rules mapping a software requirement into a corresponding ~~software item~~ software component.
23. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 21, wherein the rules include rules specifying when particular versions of a particular ~~software item~~ software component are to be utilized.
24. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 21, wherein the rules include rules specifying installation options regarding a particular ~~software item~~ software component.
25. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 21, wherein the rules include rules specifying how to test a particular ~~software item~~ software component.
26. (Original) The computer program product of claim 19, comprising additional functional descriptive data that, when executed by the computer, enables the computer to perform additional acts including:  
testing the disk image.
27. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 26, wherein testing the disk image includes verifying that ~~the at least one item~~ said plurality of software components complies with the software requirements.

28. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 26, wherein testing the disk image includes verifying that ~~the at least one item~~ said plurality of software components complies with at least one rule.

29. (Original) The computer program product of claim 19, comprising additional functional descriptive data that, when executed by the computer, enables the computer to perform additional acts including:

generating a difference image that represents differences between the disk image and another existing disk image, whereby the another existing disk image may be updated to match the disk image by applying the difference image to the another existing disk image.

30. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 19, wherein the software requirements are received through a network that includes the Internet.

31. (Currently amended) The computer program product of claim 19, wherein the software requirements can be received in terms of customer needs rather than specific software components. ~~the network includes the Internet.~~

32. (Original) The computer program product of claim 19, wherein the requirements are represented in a structured format.

33. (Original) The computer program product of claim 32, wherein the structured format is Extensible Markup Language (XML).

34. (Currently amended) A data processing system capable of creating customized disk images for loading software onto a computer, said data processing system comprising:

~~means for~~ instructions for receiving software requirements for a given system from each of a plurality of users;

instructions for determining (a) a plurality of software components that will fulfill the software requirements while addressing constraints and affinities between said plurality of software components and (b) a respective plurality of configuration options that reflect current best practices with regard to said plurality of software components;

and

~~means for instructions for generating a disk image containing at least one item~~  
~~said plurality of software components configured according to said respective plurality of~~  
~~configuration options, wherein the at least one item of software complies with at least a~~  
~~subset of the software requirements.~~

35. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 34, ~~further comprising:~~  
~~means for applying wherein said instructions for determining applies~~ rules to the software  
requirements to identify ~~software item~~ software component that comply with the software  
requirements.

36. (Original) The data processing system of claim 35, wherein the rules are stored in  
a database.

37. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 36, wherein the rules  
include rules mapping a software requirement into a corresponding ~~software item~~  
software component.

38. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 36, wherein the rules  
include rules specifying when particular versions of a particular ~~software item~~ software  
component are to be utilized.

39. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 36, wherein the rules  
include rules specifying installation options regarding a particular ~~software item~~ software  
component.

40. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 36, wherein the rules  
include rules specifying how to test a particular ~~software item~~ software component.

41. (Original) The data processing system of claim 34, further comprising:  
means for testing the disk image.

42. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 41, wherein testing the  
disk image includes verifying that ~~the at least one item~~ said plurality of software  
components complies with the software requirements.

43. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 41, wherein testing the disk image includes verifying that ~~the at least one item~~ said plurality of software complies with at least one rule.
44. (Original) The data processing system of claim 34, further comprising:  
means for generating a difference image that represents differences between the disk image and another existing disk image, whereby the another existing disk image may be updated to match the disk image by applying the difference image to the another existing disk image.
45. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 34, wherein the software requirements are received through a network that includes the Internet.
46. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 34, wherein the software requirements can be received in terms of customer needs rather than specific software components, ~~the network includes the Internet~~.
47. (Currently amended) The data processing system of claim 34, wherein the requirements are represented in a structured format, such as Extensible Markup Language (XML).
48. (Cancelled)
49. (New) The method of claim 1, further comprising storing said disk image on a computer-readable media and distributing said computer-readable media to a client.
50. (New) The data processing system of claim 34, further comprising instructions for storing said disk image on a computer-readable media, wherein said computer-readable media can be distributed to a client.